

RE: Lead story

Neal Morton

Wed 1/16/2019 12:14 PM

Sent Items

To: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>;

Ok, I'll plan for 4 p.m. just in case a newsroom meeting goes a bit long. See ya soon

-Neal Morton

Reporter I [Education Lab](#)
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From: Robinson, Tim [<mailto:tirobinson@seattleschools.org>]

Sent: Wednesday, January 16, 2019 12:13 PM

To: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>

Subject: RE: Lead story

Oh, I thought you were saying you'd get here within those times.

Either time sounds good. Whatever you want.

Tim Robinson
Lead Media Relations Specialist
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From: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>

Sent: Wednesday, January 16, 2019 12:03 PM

To: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>

Subject: RE: Lead story

Which time sounds good?

-Neal Morton

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From: Robinson, Tim [<mailto:tirobinson@seattleschools.org>]

Sent: Wednesday, January 16, 2019 11:32 AM

To: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>

Subject: RE: Lead story

Neal – sounds good. Yes, at the Stanford center.

When you get here, please give me a call on my cell – 206-465-5404.

Or you can tell the front desk person if you prefer, and they'll ring me. It's just easier if you call me.

I'll come down and get you.

Tim

Tim Robinson
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From: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>

Sent: Wednesday, January 16, 2019 11:25 AM

To: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>

Subject: Re: Lead story

I can meet y'all at 3:30 or 4. I'm assuming at the Stanford center? Appreciate you working to arrange this, Tim!

-Neal Morton

Twitter: @nealmorton

From: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Sent: Wednesday, January 16, 2019 10:51 AM
To: Neal Morton
Subject: RE: Lead story

Neal – Richard can meet between 1-1:45p today or after 3:15p today.

Please let me know what you think.

Tim

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From: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 15, 2019 5:43 PM
To: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Subject: RE: Lead story

And I forgot the most important detail! I'm fairly available tomorrow after 12 p.m. or Friday before 3 p.m. On Thursday, I'm a bit less flexible as I have to be in Olympia at noon but could work something out if necessary.

-Neal Morton

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From: Neal Morton
Sent: Tuesday, January 15, 2019 5:37 PM
To: 'Robinson, Tim' <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Subject: RE: Lead story

Hey Tim,

Thanks for getting back to me. I'm definitely hoping to sit down with you and Richard, both to get some basic facts about the testing and remediation program (what kind of flushing protocol SPS follows, how y'all determine appropriate remediation, etc.) and to go over Rachel Freeman's findings. From what I understand, some district folks – perhaps Richard – rejected her reliance on the test results for drinking water sources at individual schools compared to a district-wide aggregate. But it'd be great to get as much clarity on any mistakes or inaccuracies found within her thesis.

I also have some questions about inaccuracies and incomplete data within the test results page, so hope that's available to discuss as well.

As you note, I initially started my reporting to learn more about the district's well-regarded testing. And at least one expert I interviewed (and will quote in the story) applauded SPS for even having a point person on staff to manage the program. That's not to say, however, there isn't room to grow. Hopefully Rick can share how the water quality program has evolved and improved over the past 15 years.

As for now, the main points I included from Freeman's thesis is that 53 percent of schools on the South Side had water sources that tested above the district's own (10 ppb) threshold for lead remediation. On the North Side, 36 percent of schools had water sources testing above that level.

In my Monday email, I noted the Berkeley and San Diego school districts will pursue a 1 ppb standard, but know the device I saw in Chicago promises to get schools down to 2 ppb. We haven't yet included this in the story, but it may be worth noting how many Seattle schools, based on Freeman's analysis, would test above either the 1 or 2 ppb standard. It'd be great to Richard of the district's response on whether either of the lower limits are acceptable, or achievable, in Seattle schools.

Finally, I examined the remediation used at "hot" fixtures in each school's most recent testing data, the most used fix being a posted sign. I hope Richard can address why that's preferred v. disabling a fixture or replacing it.

I don't have additional questions for Shelley at the moment but of course would welcome her into the meeting with you and Richard.

-Neal Morton

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From: Robinson, Tim [<mailto:tirobinson@seattleschools.org>]
Sent: Tuesday, January 15, 2019 4:56 PM
To: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Subject: RE: Lead story

Neal – as I looked into this story, I was surprised to find that the district is very familiar with the study you plan on citing.

The author of the study actually traded emails with SPS staff starting in December 2017 and, eventually, met with SPS.

She approached the district so she could discuss her concerns about her findings.

Upon being presented with her information, the district found mistakes and inaccuracies within her study. She was presented with the facts, and she eventually stopped responding to district emails, etc.

I have emails between the study author and SPS staff. I can also provide you some of Richard Staudt's (he was one of the people who worked with her) analysis of the situation.

Further, Richard contacted the two members of the thesis committee and told them about the problems (that the study author agreed with) and now Richard is preparing an outline of the inaccuracies to provide to one of the two members of the committee.

At the beginning of all this, I thought your story was going to be about the high standards SPS has for water testing and the district's uniquely low lead ppb. Now, you plan on leading your story with something that, at the very least, is inaccurate.

I'm hoping we can discuss this further. If you're open to discussing further, I would love to have you sit down with Richard and me. He has a great deal of knowledge about this.

That said, if you plan on continuing with highlighting (leading with, as you said) the study, can you please provide me with the data or points that you plan on including, so we have a chance to set the record straight?

Also - did you, Neal, get enough information/quotes from Shelly Kerby?

Thank you.

Tim

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From: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Sent: Monday, January 14, 2019 10:46 AM
To: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Subject: Re: Lead story

Thanks for the quick response, Tim. (How was your commute into work btw? Viadom isn't seeming as awful as predicted...)

Definitely think Richard would be a good fit for this request, but I'll defer to his and your judgment on who best can answer a couple lines of questions.

One, I'd love to know more about whether SPS has or ever would consider lowering its lead limit to 5 ppb or 1 ppb, as [some California school districts](#) will do and as [the AAP recommends](#). Seattle was a pioneer in launching its testing and remediation plan so many years ago, so what would it take/cost/etc. to follow the lead of other school districts now?

Second, another solution we'll feature quite prominently in the story is an automatic flushing device that a Chicago Public Schools engineer invented. I've attached his presentation about the device, nicknamed Noah, and hoped Richard or whoever else could comment on whether that's a potential fix to the district's lack of any flushing protocol. (For context, CPS recently agreed to expand a pilot of Noah to 29 schools and could install the device districtwide, pending legal review.)

And finally, my reporting and Chicago sources connected me with a local researcher who examined the SPS lead testing data: <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/40231>. She shared some troubling results about elevated levels of lead, mostly concentrated on the South Side, and how inadequately she viewed the preferred remediation (posting a paper sign above "hot" drinking sources). As of now, her findings are the lead of the story, but serve as a pivot to the Chicago and California solutions.

Please let me know if you have any initial questions. I'll be available for a phone call after 2 p.m. today or most of tomorrow.

Thanks!

-Neal

From: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Sent: Monday, January 14, 2019 8:45 AM
To: Neal Morton
Subject: RE: Lead story

Hi Neal –

Whatever you need, I'll try and get it for you.

I'm available to talk...or if you want to email, that's fine.

I've asked Shelly Kerby's supervisor, Richard Staudt, if he'd be available sometime this week or if he recommended someone else. If you, Neal, have a specific person in mind, please let me know.

Thanks!

Tim

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From: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Sent: Friday, January 11, 2019 5:21 PM
To: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Subject: Lead story

Hi Tim,

My apologies for sending this so late on a Friday, but it sounds like the editors would like to run my story about testing for testing for lead and remediation in Seattle schools on Sunday, Jan. 27. The online story likely would publish the Thursday or Friday before.

It's been a while since I bugged you about arranging a potential interview with the folks in charge of the drinking water quality program. But hopefully you have some time Monday, either for a phoner or in-person meeting, to chat about the scope of the story. It'd be great to get some SPS comment into the copy before I leave town the week of MLK Day for a reporting trip out of state.

I'm pretty free Monday to work around your schedule. Thanks,

-Neal Morton

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